

HB016 Election Admin determine use of Automarks
House Administration, RM 455
January 16, 2009 @ 8 AM
Secretary Linda McCulloch's Remarks

Good morning Mr. Chair, members of the committee.
For the record, I am Montana Secretary of State Linda McCulloch.

I am here today to respectfully oppose House Bill 16, an act allowing election administrators to determine the use of accessible voting machines or Automarks for local mail-ballot elections.

While I understand the fiscal impact accessible voting equipment has on local governments and sympathize with the additional work that county election officials must do to provide this type of equipment for every election, one of my responsibilities as chief election official is to ensure that every voter at every election across the state has the opportunity to vote privately and independently.

That is what the AutoMARK does – it provides a way for Montanans with disabilities to vote with confidence.

Since the machines were introduced in 2006, a significant number of Montanans have used the Automark technology to cast their vote.

This is a trend that I hope continues.

I believe ALL elections – federal, state, and local – should be accessible to ALL the public.

Voting is a fundamental right, and Montanans with disabilities are entitled to participate in every election, despite what is on the ballot.

Congress has enacted various measures to ensure people with disabilities can register, access the polls, and vote in federal and state elections. --And now it is up to you, the Montana Legislature.

Congress passed the Help America Vote Act of 2002, requiring each polling place in a state or federal election to have at least one voting system accessible to individuals with disabilities.

The Automark machines satisfy this requirement.

Having the capability to provide an accessible voting machine for an election, but not using it, goes against everything I believe in.

That is why I am committed to working with counties and election administrators to find a solution to the issues associated with making Automarks available for all elections.

Montana's elections administrators and clerks and recorders have one of the most important jobs in the state, and my intention here today is not to criticize the efficient and effective work that they do, but to point out that we are all charged with upholding the democratic process in Montana.

The reason behind this bill request is a lack of funding to be able to accomplish all of the local election administrators' duties. Elections have become very popular and we have become very good at making elections more accessible for Montanans. This is something we can all be proud of. Many of us in this room are here because of these well-run and accessible elections.

I believe that the State should be assisting in the funding of elections across Montana. Everyone benefits from well-run elections. I will work with local Clerks and Recorders to come in next Legislature with a funding request to help all 56 counties continue to perform well-run elections for all Montana citizens.

It is sad that lack of local election funding should allow some Montanans to not have the opportunity to vote.

Accessible voting equipment should be a requirement for all elections, not an option, and that is why I cannot support this bill.

Thank you.